

## CARMEN

### Composer Biography: George Bizet



Born in Paris on October 25, 1838, Georges Bizet was registered with the legal name Alexandre-César-Léopold Bizet, but was baptized Georges Bizet and was always known by the latter name. He entered the Paris Conservatory of Music a fortnight before his tenth birthday.

Georges Bizet's first symphony, the *Symphony in C Major*, was written there when he was seventeen, evidently as a student assignment. It seems that Bizet completely forgot about it himself, and it was not discovered again until

1935, in the archives of the Conservatory library. Upon its first performance, it was immediately hailed as a junior masterpiece and a welcome addition to the early Romantic period repertoire. A delightful work (and a prodigious one, from a seventeen-year-old boy), the symphony is noteworthy for bearing an amazing stylistic resemblance to the music of Franz Schubert, whose work was virtually unknown in Paris at that time (with the possible exception of a few of his songs). A second symphony, *Roma* was not completed.

In 1857 a setting of the one-act operetta *Le docteur Miracle* won him a share in a prize offered by Jacques Offenbach. Georges Bizet also won the Music Composition scholarship of the Prix de Rome, the conditions of which required him to study in Rome for three years. There, his talent developed as he wrote such works as the opera *Don Procopio*. Apart from this period in Rome, Bizet lived in the Paris area all his life. His mother died shortly after his return to Paris. He composed the opera *Les pêcheurs de perles* (The Pearl Fishers) for the Theatre-Lyrique in 1863, which was an initial failure. He followed it with *La jolie fille de Perth* (1867), and *Jeux d'enfants* (Children's games) for the piano.

The popular *L'arlésienne* were originally produced as incidental music for a play by

Alphonse Daudet, first performed in 1872. Georges Bizet also composed a romantic opera, *Djamileh*, which is often seen as a precursor to *Carmen*, 1875. This latter opera is Bizet's best-known work and is based on a novella of the same title written in 1846 by Prosper Mérimée. Bizet composed the title role for a mezzo-soprano. *Carmen* was not initially well-received but praise for it eventually came from well-known contemporaries including Claude Debussy, Camille Saint-Saëns and Pyotr Tchaikovsky. Their views proved to be prophetic, as *Carmen* has since become one of the most popular works in the entire operatic repertoire. However Bizet did not live to see its success, as he died from angina at the age of 36 a few months after its first few performances, on his third wedding anniversary. He was buried in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

Source: [www.bach-cantata.com](http://www.bach-cantata.com)